

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394

Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Welfare Task Force	2-7
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	8-15
Fatherhood	16-17
Juvenile Justice	18-19
Domestic Violence	20
Health Care	21
Food Assistance	22-23
Homelessness	24-25
DHS Budget	26
*JET Program	27-28

STATEWIDE

Human Services creates task force Team to focus on foster care

BY ROBIN ERB • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • APRIL 23, 2008

With a new leader at its helm and a lawsuit on the horizon, Michigan's Department of Human Services will team up with nonprofit groups, legislators and children currently and formerly in its care to improve services.

The first step for the 70-member task force is to agree on what the system should provide for at-risk families and youth, said Ismael Ahmed, executive director of the department.

"We're starting with the philosophy," he said, and moving to "what's working and not working, and what changes need to be made, and how do we benchmark them, and how do we resource them?"

The task force expects to have recommendations by February, he said Tuesday. The state has set aside \$300,000 for the task force.

Ahmed was appointed Human Services Department director last year amid allegations by Children's Rights, a New York-based group, that widespread inefficiency and overwhelming caseloads in the foster care system leave children to languish in care, compromise their health and safety and prevent permanency plans. The group is suing in U.S. District Court in Detroit. A trial is set for June 3.

Ahmed said the lawsuit wasn't the driving force behind the task force, but Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, questioned the timing. The group had not heard about the task force until contacted by the Free Press, even though Children's Rights and Michigan's Department of Human Services have been in settlement talks.

Just how many task force recommendations will be put in place may hinge on budgets and changes in law. But Carol Goss, cochair of the new task force and president and CEO of the Skillman Foundation, which focuses on child welfare, noted that private foundations and others may be interested in pushing changes.

Contact **ROBIN ERB** at 313-222-2708 or *rerb@freepress.com*.

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

Lansing

Groups to mend child welfare

Gary Heinlein / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- The Michigan Department of Human Services and partner groups are setting up a yearlong task force of more than 70 people, at a state cost of about \$300,000, to dramatically reform welfare programs for children.

The task force, which organizers said includes children affected by the programs, will issue its report in February, Human Services Director Ismael Ahmed said Tuesday. The first meeting will be May 19. Members include lawmakers, welfare activists and university officials.

"Reformation of child welfare is our top issue and will be for as long as I'm here," Ahmed said.

Leading the task force will be C. Patrick Babcock, a former state Human Services director, and Carol Goss, chief executive of the Skillman Foundation.

Babcock, the department's director from 1987-91, vowed the task force "will do everything possible to improve life outcomes" for children who are in the state's social welfare system, including 75,000 a year in protective services.

Goss said many states are trying to revamp their child welfare programs, but Michigan's "proactive" approach through its Human Services Department is unusual.

"We could be a model for the rest of the country," she said.

The task force will develop guidelines for child welfare, review state and federal standards, recommend measurable outcomes for child care agencies and recommend government action to achieve its goals, officials said.

It will focus on such goals as keeping families together, reducing cases of abuse or neglect and providing for more visits from human services workers, Babcock said. He said the aggressive approach toward reform under Ahmed is a change from the practice of reacting to tragedies.

The department's foster care program has been hit by a class action lawsuit. A report compiled as part of the lawsuit charges that its record keeping and investigations are so poor that children in the system are in constant danger of abuse.

Michigan's Children President Jack Kresnak said child welfare is a "community problem."

"If the community won't tolerate the mistreatment of children, we'll see a lot less mistreatment of children," he said.

You can reach Gary Heinlein at (517) 371-3660 or gheinlein@detnews.com.

Michigan Report

April 22, 2008

D.H.S. UNVEILS CHILD WELFARE TASK FORCE

As promised in recent weeks, the Department of Human Services unveiled on Tuesday what officials said is a major strategy in overhauling the child welfare system.

DHS Director Ismael Ahmed announced the Michigan Child Welfare Improvement Task Force, made up of more than 70 members who represent community agencies, families, policymakers and the department.

Mr. Ahmed said he hasn't commissioned "just another report be filed away." By collecting all of the work that community and nonprofit groups have already done and building on it, he said he hopes to use one of the most innovative and comprehensive approaches to fixing the child welfare system, which he has named his top priority in the department.

"There's no magic bullet to fixing the system," he told the Senate Appropriations DHS Subcommittee Tuesday afternoon, "Not even money. We need the collective knowledge of everyone involved."

The task force will have its first meeting on May 19th, followed by an "aggressive" nine months of meetings aimed at gauging how to fix the system and how to measure change to show actual proof of success.

The effort is projected to cost DHS \$300,000.

One benchmark the group could immediately focus on, said taskforce Co-Chair Carol Goss, is directing DHS to focus its efforts on reducing the number of overrepresented minority children in foster care and the juvenile justice system.

Ms. Goss, CEO of the Skillman Foundation, which focuses on children's advocacy in Southeast Michigan, was the chair of the Michigan Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare, which released its findings in March 2006.

Former director of the then-named Social Services Department Patrick Babcock will sit with Ms. Goss as co-chair of the task force.

He said the group will essentially ask what our society expects for "our children" and how to deliver those services.

One group with an interest in the how the state measures its improvement is the national group Children's Rights, which is suing the state in part because

its foster care caseload ratios are higher and the time kids are in limbo is higher than the national thresholds.

Mr. Ahmed said that aligning the state's foster care standards with national standards is one component of the task force mission and may factor into the Children's Rights lawsuit. But, he said, whether the new task force impresses the group enough to settle out of court or if DHS ends up paying millions of dollars in judgments, the department is moving forward now with its task of reforming the child welfare system no matter how the lawsuit plays out.

Jack Kresnak, the newly-appointed head of Michigan's Children, admitted that he was initially skeptical of yet "another" taskforce when he was asked to sit on the panel.

Yet, he said, he's now convinced that there's "real value" in the approach DHS is taking in encompassing the entire community in solving the problems that plague the child welfare system.

"If communities won't tolerate mistreatment of children, it won't happen," Mr. Kresnak said.



Uncle describes abuse

Accused child killer favored victim's sister, he testifies

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The uncle of a Warren woman accused of murdering her 2-year-old son said his niece treated the boy poorly compared to her daughter, and at one time hit him so hard he flew and hit his head on a coffee table.

Matthew Conklin, uncle of defendant Crystal Conklin, recalled an incident during one of several weeks-long stays at his home by Conklin, her live-in boyfriend and their two children, Angelique "Angel" and Sean, because of money problems.

"Crystal was sitting on a love seat and Sean was crawling up her legs saying, 'Mommy,'" Matthew Conklin said in court. "She grabbed him by the forehead and threw him with such force that his skull hit the coffee table and went back forward like a ball.

"Angel looked at me and started screaming. She (Crystal Conklin) put her attention to Angel. She picked up Angel and said, 'Poor Angel.'"

Conklin's testimony came on the second day of testimony in Conklin's felony murder and child abuse trial in Macomb County Circuit Court in front of Judge John Foster.

Sean Sowards, three months short of 3, was found unresponsive and lying in a pool of his vomit between 7 and 7:30 p.m. June 11 in the couple's Jarvis Street home when the father, Michael Sowards, arrived. They immediately took the boy to a hospital, where doctors found more than 40 bruises, cuts and abrasions on him. He died two days later.

Matthew Conklin, 40, said he often told Crystal Conklin, 27, to take better care of her son and believed she favored Angel, who was about two years older.

"Angel got all the positive attention and positive interaction," he said. "It seemed Sean was always dished off to the side."

Crystal Conklin complained her son wouldn't sleep and cried frequently, he said under questioning by assistant Macomb prosecutor Therese Tobin. "She was very upset at his crying," he said. "She once said that something was wrong with him and then said she thought he was doing it on purpose."

Matthew Conklin told her that her screaming and treatment of Sean negatively affected him. He said Sean seemed underdeveloped.

"I told her the baby was absorbing all her energy, and it was not positive energy," he said.

He said Sean's face "was always covered with blankets," and she tried to keep him in a playpen in the home's dark, damp and unfinished basement, and the garage.

Matthew Conklin said he more than once saw scratches and small bruises on Sean's face, but was told by his mother that Sean often fell or walked into walls because of poor eyesight due to an eye infection and sometimes was hit by Angel.

He said he saw Angel "push" Sean "a handful of times," but didn't see her hit him.

After his niece was arrested, he visited her at the Macomb County Jail.

"She wanted to know what was happening to Michael (Sowards)," he said. "She said she needed to know because she was not going down for this by herself."

Michael Sowards and Crystal Conklin were arrested June 13, and after both were interviewed, Sowards was released and Conklin formally charged.

Matthew Conklin said Crystal came to his home after Sean was hospitalized. Under cross-examination by defense attorney Ronald Goldstein, he acknowledged she appeared upset and panicked, and was crying, he said.

She told her uncle she thought Sean had an "epileptic seizure," he said.

Michael Sowards earlier Tuesday testified that he had lied to police when he was first interviewed when he said he never saw Crystal Conklin strike Sean. On Tuesday he changed his story and testified he did see his girlfriend strike their son.

He said he initially wasn't truthful because "at the time I couldn't believe she could do that to my son. I didn't believe what was happening. It was a nightmare. I didn't think someone who I cared about so much could do that to my son. I believed she was excessive at times, but I didn't believe she was capable."

Also testifying was Warren police Cpl. Chad Richardson, who interviewed Crystal Conklin twice, about 1 a.m. June 12 and about 8 p.m. June 13.

Conklin told him in the hours before Sean was taken to the hospital, she said he had vomited and she put him to bed. She said she went to him lying on his bed and said, "Seany, Seany" but he wouldn't wake up. She noticed he had vomited twice more.

But in another interview she said she and Sean were in the bathroom and Sean "slipped and fell, and she couldn't catch him in time," according to Richardson.

She denied she ever struck Sean, only slapping him for discipline.

She told Richardson due to Sean's eye problems, he often bumped into walls in the house.

"She said he was acting like a ping pong ball bouncing against the walls in the hallway," Richardson testified.

The jury trial is scheduled to continue today and should conclude Thursday, according to attorneys.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/042308/loc_local03.shtml

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **battlecreekenquirer.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Apr 23, 2008
Trial begins for man in death of girl, 4
Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

Jurors begin hearing from lawyers and witnesses today in the trial for a man charged with killing a 4-year-old girl.

Chadwick Damon, 21, of Marshall is charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in the July 17 death of his girlfriend's daughter, Mackenzie Vandenheede. The little girl died five days after she was found with severe head injuries.

On Tuesday a jury of 14 people — 10 women and four men — was selected in Calhoun County Circuit Court to hear testimony from as many as 50 witnesses during the next several days. Two jurors will be dismissed at random at the end of the trial and 12 will deliberate.

If found guilty of first-degree or felony murder, Damon would face a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

Damon called Marshall firefighters July 12 to the home he shared with the child and her mother, Jill Vandenheede, on South Kalamazoo Street. At an earlier hearing, emergency responders said the child had a pulse but was breathing only four times a minute.

A pathologist testified the little girl had three severe head injuries and bruises on her face, upper chest, shoulder, lower back, abdomen, arms and legs. Her right arm was broken and in a cast.

During jury selection, Prosecutor John Hallacy said Damon made several statements to police, at first denying he did anything to the girl and later admitting he struck her.

Police testified in November Damon told them he used the heel of his hand to hit her in the back of the head because she would not go to bed.

Defense attorney Mark Webb cautioned jurors to listen carefully to the evidence and avoid emotional reactions to the case.

The trial is before Circuit Judge Stephen Miller.

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.



Fall didn't kill baby, doctor says in Mata trial

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- The projected photo on the courtroom wall showed the little girl beaming a toothless smile as she sits next to her big brother.

Lucretia Teunis' mother, Jennifer, gasped back sobs as she looked at the photo. Jeffery Mata, the man accused of murdering the baby, stared down at the table.

Kent County Assistant Prosecutor Helen Brinkman followed that picture with photos of the 8-month-old in the final hours of her life on July 9. Her eyes were closed and a machine was breathing for her after her head was so violently jolted that her brain stopped performing its most basic functions.

Jennifer Teunis told the jury Tuesday her baby was not fussy. She said when it became clear that the her little girl would not survive, she was baptized.

There is no dispute Lucretia sustained her fatal injuries at the hands of her mother's live-in boyfriend, said defense attorney Jeffrey O'Hara. But it was not an intentional act and does not make Mata, 22, a murderer, O'Hara said.

On the morning of July 9, Teunis kissed Lucretia goodbye and rode with the baby's grandmother to the West Side Complex, where she was working to get her GED.

At home was Lucretia, her 5-year-old son and the 3-year-old son of Mata, whom she had met at her night job at a gas station. The two dated for four months before Mata moved into the town house at 1942 Stonebrook Circle NE in mid-June.

Around 10 a.m., she got a call from Mata, who said the baby stopped breathing.

Mata maintains he was carrying the baby down stairs when she squirmed out of his grip and fell to the floor. She was crying hysterically. He gave a little shake and her head hit the floor.

"He didn't know how to handle the situation," O'Hara told the jury in his opening statement. "He had never heard a baby cry like that."

But Mata told the baby's mother nothing of injuring the girl, and Teunis continued to maintain his innocence.

"If I suspected Jeffery I would tell you," Teunis told officers when they interviewed her at Spectrum Health Butterworth Hospital.

In a statement for Grand Rapids Police Detective Dan Adams, Mata wrote, "I accidentally dropped her. I'm real sorry. I just don't want anyone to be mad at me."

But there's no way the type of brain trauma suffered by Lucretia could have occurred from a short drop or minor shaking, according to Dr. N. Debra Simms. The pediatrician at DeVos Children's Hospital specializes in child abuse and neglect.

Simms examined Lucretia before she was declared brain dead July 10. The doctor likened the injuries to when a child is in a car crash or falls several stories or is violently and repeatedly shaken.

O'Hara asked Teunis repeatedly whether she had ever seen Mata act violently or abusively or even raise his voice. She said no.

Teunis long defended Mata, even when her mother saw bruises on the baby; Teunis attributed them to roughhousing with the 5-year-old.

But when Brinkman asked Teunis on Tuesday if she still believed Mata loved her daughter like one of his own, she replied: "Not after what happened, no."

Testimony continues today in the trial before Circuit Judge Donald Johnston.

Send e-mail to the author: bdeiters@grpress.com

©2008 Grand Rapids Press

© 2008 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

Preventing child abuse through awareness

By Mardi Suhs

CADILLAC - Substantiated cases of child abuse in Wexford-Missaukee counties have risen slightly in the last five years, mimicking a national trend.

Not only are child abuse rates going up, but the cases are more serious.

"I have seen a rise in the intensity of cases, they are more " severe," explained Shelly Marcusse, who for 20 years has worked for the ISD in violence and substance abuse prevention.

"Instead of getting called because some kid is truant, running around," Marcusse noted, "we are getting called into cases that are multi-faceted and more serious."

Child abuse and neglect might include instances where children aren't supervised or provided with medical attention, food and clothing - to cases of physical and sexual abuse that cause life threatening injuries and death.

Trooper Marc Moore of the Michigan State Police has investigated cases of child abuse locally for the last 13 years.

"The vast majority of my day typically involves investigating criminal sexual conduct or child abuse," he stated.

Moore agreed with Marcusse's statement that the cases he " investigates have become more " serious.

"The two cases we have had here most recently are very serious," he stated, referring to two cases of suspected child abuse that have occurred since January; one resulted in the death of a child, and the second, a "shaken baby" case, resulted in serious brain injuries and a broken rib. Charges have been filed in both cases but neither suspect has been convicted.

"Child abuse is sometimes generational," he observed. "I've been here almost 13 years and now I'm starting to see some of the victims that I had several years ago are now suspects. Typically the families have a history of this activity. When you are raised a certain way, it's difficult to change from that."

As difficult as his case work is, Moore said he does find gratification in bringing abusers to justice and helping the person who's been physically assaulted.

"Once that resolves," he explained, "although it's emotional, it's pretty gratifying to really help that person out. Sometimes you are helping both sides. Most of the people who do this stuff don't want to do it. I'm not making excuses for them. People don't start the day thinking " I'm going to abuse my child. It ends up happening and they are shameful."

Since January, Moore has been working on 18 cases, a case load that represents roughly a third of all cases, since Child Protective Services, he explained, distributes the cases on a rotating basis among the local Sheriff's Department, City Police and the Michigan State Police. In addition, many cases are reported directly to the MSP by the victims themselves.

By law, the Department of Human Services has the responsibility to receive and respond to any complaint of child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, maltreatment or improper custody.

Linda Jackson-Mom, former victims' rights coordinator for Osceola County, believes that people should get involved when they suspect instances of child abuse.

"Kids are for years in situations that should never happen and people know. They just don't think it's any of their business so they don't say anything."

In Michigan, child abuse and neglect has been growing by almost 25 percent for the past ten years. Every day, there are 375 reported cases of child abuse or neglect in our state, totaling more than 28,100 Michigan children victimized in 2005. The most victimized children in our state are 4 years-old and under.

mardijo@chartermi.net | 775-NEWS (6397)

How you can help

Diane Dykstra of the Wexford County United Way is part of a group of concerned citizens working to prevent child abuse. The Child Protection Council is a group of volunteers that partner with the Michigan Children's Trust Fund to provide educational workshops and programs to reach the source of child abuse and neglect.

"The United Way is seeing those rates going up, so child abuse prevention is one of our top priorities," Dykstra explained. "We are hoping to get others involved in prevention work. It's so much easier to prevent than it is to fix the problem after it happens. The cost of child abuse goes on and on to every generation. Any kind of prevention is going to pay us back in the future."

Dykstra pointed out that certain protective factors have been shown to reduce abuse and neglect in families. One of those factors is when parents have a regular support system.

"Social connections help," she pointed out. "If a neighbor reaches out, sometimes it helps."

"We are always looking for volunteers," she added. "This is a community collaborative group open to volunteers. We are trying to respond to the needs of the community with ongoing education."

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and the United Way of Wexford County, along with the local Child Protection Council, is urging community members to help prevent child abuse and neglect locally. To join the Local Child Protection Council call 775-3753. The group meets monthly on the second Friday at 8:30 a.m. in the Council on Aging meeting room in downtown Cadillac.

Ten Ways to Help Prevent Child Abuse

www.preventchildabuse.org

- Be a nurturing parent.
- Help a friend, neighbor or relative
- Help yourself when overwhelmed, don't take it out on your child.
- If your baby cries, learn what to do if your baby won't stop crying. Never shake a baby.
- Get involved with the local Child Protection Council.
- Help develop parenting resources at your local library.
- Promote programs in school
- Monitor your child's television and video viewing " watching violent films and TV programs can harm young children.
- Volunteer locally in child abuse prevention programs.
- Report suspected abuse or neglect by calling the Department of Human Services, Child and Adult Protective Services 24 hours " 779-4540.

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **battlecreekenquirer.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Apr 23, 2008

Experts: Men needed in young kids' lives

Ryan Holland

The Enquirer

Early childhood education is a woman's world, but it would be nothing without a man to care.

This was the message Tuesday at Kellogg Community College's Men Matter to Kids event, which drew about 250 students and professionals to the school to learn how to get more men involved in children's early years.

Speakers diagnosed the lack of male involvement and provided tips on how to get involved, while attendees participated in sessions concentrating on things like brain research and community resources.

"We're trying to get the word out there that male involvement, and parent involvement in general, is so vital to kids' success and for them to be prepared for school," Dawn Larsen, program manager of the Early Childhood Education program at KCC, said.

That men were not as prevalent in early childhood was even evident at the event itself, where a large majority of those attending were women.

Only about 10 of 300 students in Larsen's KCC program are men, Larson said.

Low pay, social stigmas and fear of molestation accusations all have contributed to a lack of men in the classroom, especially in kindergarten and pre-kindergarten, said featured speaker Wes Garner, a professor at Tri-State University in Angola, Ind.

"Men teachers want to be caring just like the female teachers in the building, but too often they are looked upon as disciplinarians ... or heavy haulers," Garner said.

Garner recommended providing scholarships and allocating more pay to teacher salaries to spur more interest on the part of men in early childhood education.

But speakers said male involvement starts even before the classroom.

The Fatherhood/Male Involvement Program at the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan seeks to provide support for low-income families in order to ensure fathers are an active part of their children's lives.

By supplying a strong role model early, Fatherhood Program Coordinator Barry Smith said, the benefits would accrue later in life.

"This is our time to show ourselves, to pattern ourselves: This is the way you hold a door for a woman, real men are polite, real men stand up for themselves when it's appropriate," he said, speaking to one of the breakout groups.

For 19-year-old KCC student Emerald Diamante, whose only memory of his father was looking up at him as a toddler, the event was an important display of the strength of a male bond.

"This program itself I think is a pretty big step because not too many men are educated about what kinds of things they can do," said Diamante, who plans to study physical therapy and work with children. "All your teachers are predominately women, and we're just as important."

Ryan Holland can be reached at 966-0690 or rholland@battlecr.gannett.com.



April 23, 2008

Youth pleads guilty in foster brother's death

Boy, 16, admits pointing, firing loaded shotgun

Derek Wallbank

Lansing State Journal

Sixteen-year-old Thomas Mack pleaded guilty Tuesday to second-degree murder in connection with the April 3, 2007, shooting of his 14-year-old foster brother, Daniel Austin.

Daniel's father and grandmother, Ed and Mary Austin, cried as Mack, through mostly one-word answers to Ing-ham County Circuit Court Judge James Giddings' questions, confessed to shooting Daniel.

"Do you wish to plead guilty, sir?" Giddings asked Mack.

"Yes," he replied.

Mary Austin said hearing the confession was difficult.

"It's like the bottom of your world fell out," she said.

The shooting happened in an apartment at 319 E. Hillsdale St., where the boys' foster parents' son, Christopher Stragier, then 18, lived.

Police found Daniel with gunshot wounds on his left cheek and on the right side of the back of his head.

Mack, who appeared in court wearing a black-and-white striped jail uniform, said he stood five feet from Daniel, who was sitting on a loveseat at the apartment, when he pointed a loaded 12-gauge shotgun at Daniel's face and pulled the trigger.

"It was hard to listen to him admit it," Ed Austin said.

"But I give him kudos for that," he said. "He stood there like a man and admitted what he did. He didn't try to deny it."

Mack, Daniel and another foster brother were in the apartment when the shooting happened.

Stragier said at a court hearing last year that he had taken in the three boys overnight to give his parents a break.

When Stragier went to work the day of the shooting, he left Mack, Daniel and the other boy in his apartment with the shotgun and an assault rifle, according to the testimony.

Steve and Judy Stragiers' foster license is no longer active, according to Michigan Department of Human Services records.

Mack faces sentencing as an adult June 18. He faces the possibility of up to life in prison, though prosecutors recommended his sentence be between 85 and 120 months - about seven to 10 years.

Both Mary and Ed Austin said they have forgiven Mack, and are praying that he will be rehabilitated in

prison.

"I want Thomas to be a useful member of society and accomplish something with his life to make up for what he did," Mary Austin said.

Staff writer Kevin Grasha contributed to this report.

Contact Derek Wallbank at 267-1301 or [dwallbank @lsj.com](mailto:dwallbank@lsj.com).

Domestic call leads to pot charges

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

By Lisa Medendorp

Imedendorp@muskegonchronicle.com

LAKETON TWP. -- Muskegon County Sheriff's deputies responding to a call about a woman yelling for help early Saturday reported finding a marijuana-growing operation at a Laketon Township residence.

The 32-year-old resident, who was arrested, said he was "trying to save a buck" by growing his own, according to the police report. He said he used the drug every day.

The same police report indicated that deputies initially saw about 75 to 100 small marijuana plants in planter boxes through a window.

Police were called at 3:13 a.m., when a neighborhood resident reported seeing a woman running up and down the 1200 block of Green Creek Road yelling that she needed help.

When officers arrived at the scene, the woman had gone into a home that by then was completely darkened.

Police knocked on the door, but got no response. Deputies peered through a sliding glass door at the rear of the house. They reported seeing marijuana plants sitting in front of the slider.

They knocked on the front door of the house again. This time, a light came on at the rear of the home. Deputies went to the rear and suddenly the marijuana plants were gone.

After obtaining a search warrant for the home at 1265 N. Green Creek, they returned, announced they had the warrant, and then kicked the door in when they got no response.

Shortly afterward, they encountered a man and woman. They were informed police were searching for drugs. The man then said: "I got rid of all the plants by flushing them down the toilet," according to the police report.

Officers then found potting soil all over the floor around the toilet and a few small pieces of plants. The report said a small tin of marijuana seeds also was found under a bed.

A search of the laundry room yielded planter flats and pots as well as a paper grocery bag that was half-full of dried marijuana plants and some seeds, police said.

The police report said the woman had visible injuries, and the man admitted that he was mad because she came home late and was allegedly drunk. He denied physically assaulting her.

The man has since been charged with two counts of delivery of marijuana as well as one count of domestic violence. He bonded out of the Muskegon County Jail with a \$5,000 surety bond Monday prior to 60th District Court arraignment. Arraignment has been set for May 1.



April 20, 2008

'Local stars' dance for charity at benefit

The area's first-ever Dancing with the Local Stars, with a Casino Night and Live Auction, will generate more than \$50,000 for Care Free Medical & Dental, the local nonprofit clinic that offers free care to anyone without insurance.

The event, taking place April 25 at the Country Club of Lansing, 2200 Moores River Dr. from 7 p.m. to midnight, will feature Tico Duckett, Jane Aldrich and Dianne Byrum.

Tickets to the event are \$100 each, \$175 for a pair, \$425 for five tickets, \$700 for a package of eight tickets, and \$850 for 10 tickets.

For tickets, contact Lenore Quiroga at 887-5922 ext. 2

[Print Page](#)

\$20,942 available in emergency food assistance

Tuesday, April 22, 2008 11:12 AM EDT

CASSOPOLIS - Cass County has been chosen to receive \$20,942 to supplement emergency food and shelter programs in the county.

A local board made up of representatives from local human service organizations as well as county government will determine how the funds awarded to Cass County are to be distributed among the emergency food and shelter programs in the area.

The Local Board is responsible for recommending agencies to receive these funds and any additional funds available under this phase of the program.

Under terms of the grant from the National Board, local organizations chosen to receive funds must: 1.) be private voluntary non-profits or units of government, 2.) have an accounting system, 3.) practice non-discrimination, 4.) have demonstrated the capability to deliver emergency food and/or shelter programs, and 5.) if they are a private voluntary organization, they must have a voluntary board. Qualifying organizations are urged to apply.

Public or private voluntary organizations interested in applying for Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds must contact Margaret Shultz, Local Board Chairperson, at (269) 445-0233 or at shultzm@michigan.gov. Deadline for applications is May 7.



04/22/2008

Bad Axe letter carriers part of food drive May 10

The Huron Daily Tribune

BAD AXE — On May 10, letter carriers in over 10,000 cities and towns across America, including Bad Axe, will deliver much more than mail when they walk and drive along their postal routes. They also will collect the goodness and compassion of their postal customers participating in the 16th annual NALC National Food Drive, the largest one-day food drive in the nation.

The effort by letter carriers represented by the National Association of Letter Carriers (AFL-CIO), with the help of rural letter carriers, other postal employees and numerous other volunteers, has resulted in delivery of more than 836 million pounds of donations to community food banks and pantries over the past 15 years.

In 2007, the drive collected 70,745,176 pounds of food for the needy from postal customers. That brought the total for the first 15 years to 836.2 million pounds.

Letter carriers will collect non-perishable food donations left by mailboxes and in post offices and deliver them to community food banks, pantries and shelters. Nearly 1,500 local NALC branches in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands are involved.

All citizens need to do is place a box or can of non-perishable food next to their mailbox before their letter carrier delivers mail on May 10.

The carrier will do all the rest.

The food is taken back to a postal station, sorted, and then delivered to an area food bank or pantry.

There it is available for needy families.

©Huron Daily Tribune 2008



Summit targets homelessness

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

susanharrison@muskegonchronicle.com

MUSKEGON -- Dwight Pledger stood before an audience called together Tuesday to combat the devastating issue of homelessness in West Michigan -- and offered his own story as inspiration.

Once he was homeless, hooked on cocaine and in despair of finding his way.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy and a successful real-estate broker in Perris, Calif., Pledger lost everything in the 1980s: his family, his business, his home, his possessions, even his two Mercedes-Benzes.

"It was a long, hard road to restoration," Pledger said. "But I'm an example of what's possible."

Now a motivational speaker who travels around the country, Pledger, 55, repeated his message of "what's possible" throughout his keynote speech to the 100 or so participants who attended the first annual Region 3 Homeless Solutions Training at Muskegon Community College. Most in the audience were professionals who work with the homeless in an 11-county area that includes Muskegon, Ottawa, Newaygo and Oceana counties.

"Sometimes you might think your labor is in vain, but it's people like you who gave me a second chance," Pledger said.

A real-estate broker, Pledger is also president and co-founder of Ray of Hope Ministries, a recovery and restoration "parachurch" organization that supports men and women "coming out of various addictions and destructive lifestyles."

"Certainly, his story tells us we shouldn't write anybody off," said Kenneth Shelton, executive director of Muskegon Oceana Community Action Partnership. "People are worthy of second ... even third chances."

Later in the morning, participants would tackle some tough subjects -- like what rental assistance is offered by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, how renters can prepare to become homeowners, fair housing laws and obligations -- in break-out sessions.

But for 45 minutes, Pledger laid out his own story in an effort, he said, "to remind you that call to serve is still valid. You are still needed."

By 1979, Pledger was "hopelessly addicted to cocaine." Losing his family and home couldn't stem the tide of addiction. Even ending up in jail for four months didn't stop his downward spiral. Finally, he and his wife, Sadie, to whom he's been married 35 years, reconciled. It took him another few months to get off drugs and start on the road to recovery, but he's been "clean and sober" since 1986.

Now he spends his time motivating people to do the same.

"When people say: 'That could have been me. There but for the grace of God, go I.' I say: That was me," Pledger said.

But sometimes his message is for the professionals whose job includes care for the homeless.

"Because people cared in my life, I'm here today, and people are where they are today because of what you did," Pledger said. "On behalf of the many, I want to thank you."

After his keynote speech, Pledger stayed on to talk one on one with people while others attended "break-out" sessions before the day's final event: a panel discussion between tenants and landlords.

The training was sponsored by The Corporation for Supportive Housing and Muskegon Oceana Community Action Partnership.

Stacey Vandenberg -- deputy director of West Michigan Therapy and co-chairwoman of the Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care Network -- described Tuesday's training as "getting back to the basics" for those who are there.

"It reminds us that there are solutions to overwhelming problems. We can end homelessness," she said.

Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care Network is a local consortium of agencies and programs determined to eliminate homelessness in the area by 2016.

©2008 Muskegon Chronicle

© 2008 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

April 22, 2008

HOUSE PASSES D.H.S. BUDGET

The House finally cleared its last chamber-originating budget on Tuesday, sending appropriations for the Department of Human Services to the Senate. A floor substitute to [HB 5814](#) added \$5 million in general fund spending compared to what came out of the Appropriations Committee earlier in the year. That brings the total appropriation to \$4.6 billion, \$1.3 billion in general funds.

The House version represents an increase in gross spending of \$42 million, or .9 percent, compared to the current fiscal year. General fund spending would rise under the budget by \$21.8 million, or 1.7 percent, comparatively. But the bill spends less general fund and gross dollars compared to the executive budget recommendation.

The floor substitute keeps much of the budget intact from where it was in committee, though it does add more money to give licensed day care providers a 4 percent rate increase at a cost of \$5.6 million. That line item had been \$4.9 million under the committee version.

The bill also provides \$700,000 in general funds to finance one-time incentive payments for day care relative providers and aides to participate in a 10-hour child care training program. The legislation also includes funding to support childcare home readiness and other training for day care activities.

The budget also recognizes more savings through child support pass-through than the House committee version did.

House Democrats procedurally rejected Republican amendments that would put a four-year limit on cash assistance, ban public assistance to illegal aliens and require the department to report its expenditures in a more specific and real-time basis.

The budget was sent to the Senate on a party-line 58-49 vote with three GOP members absent.

Phyllis Washburn, spokesperson for House Republicans, said their members wanted to see those amendments added to the bill, but also wanted to see more substantive changes to the department to reflect what kind of money the state has to appropriate.

April 22, 2008

AHMED: J.E.T. ISN'T ENOUGH TO MEET FEDERAL WORK REQUIREMENTS

Because of a high population of people who can't work and the limited number of activities counted by the federal government as training or work, the Jobs Education and Training program, once touted as the Department of Human Services' answer to meeting federal work requirements, won't bring the state up to the 50 percent work requirement it was supposed to meet by last fall, DHS Director Ismael Ahmed told the Senate Appropriations DHS Subcommittee on Tuesday.

Committee Chair [Sen. Bill Hardiman](#) (R-Kentwood) called the news "disappointing" since the department had assured the panel last year (before Mr. Ahmed began his tenure) that JET would allow the state to meet its goal of getting 50 percent of welfare recipients to work or in training.

Mr. Ahmed said that when he was appointed he promised to be honest.

"And I'm only being truthful with you now as I see it," he said.

He said that a third of the welfare population is permanently excused from work because of their situations, for example, if they have severely ill children they must care for.

The department now has 30 percent of its recipients at work or in federally approved training. Mr. Ahmed said with so many people not able to work, he doesn't see how DHS can bring that number 20 percentage points higher with JET alone.

One way JET can improve the number by a few percentage points is by addressing the additional one third of recipients who are temporarily exempt from work, such as women who have given birth recently.

Ron Hicks, legislative liaison for DHS, said the department is working to train that population through JET during the temporary lull in work so that when their exemption expires, they are ready to work.

But unless the federal government modifies some of its expectations, it's not likely that Michigan or many other states will meet the halfway mark, he said. (To date, only two states have half of their recipients working.)

Mr. Hicks said that the federal government will likely expand the type of activities it counts as qualifying training or education in order to compromise with states.

Examples of those activities, which JET conducts, would include education that doesn't necessarily lead to a degree but which is vital to advancement, such as basic reading, resume preparation, math skills, etc.

Although he didn't give specifics during his presentation, Mr. Ahmed said he would honor Mr. Hardiman's request to present at a later date other recommendations about policy changes that could bring DHS in line with federal guidelines.